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Implementation of the recommendations on the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum and on the Millennium Development Goals

Report of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues

Submitted by the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Summary

The 2007 meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues, held in Montreal, Canada, from 17 to 19 September, was convened and hosted by the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in accordance with its terms of reference and the practice established in 2002 of rotating the chairing of the Support Group annually among its members. The main theme of the meeting was "climate change and indigenous peoples".

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I. Introduction

1. The 2007 meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues, held in Montreal, Canada, from 17 to 19 September, was convened and hosted by the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in accordance with its terms of reference and the practice established in 2002 of rotating the chairing of the Support Group annually among its members. The theme of the meeting was "climate change and indigenous peoples". Other agenda items included: follow-up of the 2006 annual meeting of the Group; coordination of international work on indicators; areas for possible inter-agency collaboration; the status of the United Nations development guidelines; an internal reflection on the sixth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; strengthening of working methods, member support and a revised terms of reference; and other matters. Under other matters, the members of the Group reflected on various mandates after the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and provided updates on agency work relevant to indigenous peoples.

2. Representatives of the following United Nations agencies, multilateral organizations and international financial organizations participated in the meeting: the United Nations University-Institute of Advanced Studies, the World Bank, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), Fondo Indigena, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

3. The Support Group regretted the absence of the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme from the meeting, especially given the special contributions that those organizations could make to many issues on the agenda, in particular, climate change. The Group noted the restructuring of the Inter-American Development Bank and expressed the hope that its focus on indigenous peoples' issues would be maintained and strengthened, especially given the recent adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

4. The Support Group welcomed the representation of the United Nations University-Institute of Advanced Studies, which attended the annual meeting for the first time. The representative, Sam Johnston, provided an update on the development of the new United Nations University Traditional Knowledge Institute, which would be hosted by Charles Darwin University, Australia, but have close associations with other partner campuses, especially James Cook University, Australia. The Group welcomed the establishment of such an institute.

5. The following Permanent Forum members also participated in the meeting: Victoria Tauli-Corpus (Chairperson), Wilton Littlechild and Hassan Id Balkassm.

6. The present report highlights the main issues discussed and the agreements reached among the participants for follow-up. The agreements reached, including

conclusions and recommendations, are grouped according to items on the agenda of the meeting.

7. The meeting was opened by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ahmed Djoghlaf, together with the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Sha Zukang. The members of the Support Group were joined by the staff of the Convention on Biological Diversity for the opening session. The Chairperson of the Permanent Forum and the Chief of the secretariat, Elsa Stamatopoulou, also provided opening remarks. Wilton Littlechild provided an indigenous welcome to the meeting on behalf of the Cree peoples of Canada.

8. The members of the Support Group thanked Ahmed Djoghlaf and the Convention staff for the substantive nature and high quality preparations of the meeting as well as the efficient and friendly organizational arrangements.

9. Section II of the present report provides the statement of the Support Group on the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Section III provides a summary of the Group's discussions based on the agenda items and sets out recommendations. The annex to the report contains the revised and adopted terms of reference.

II. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

10. The Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues hails the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights on Indigenous Peoples by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007. The Declaration sends out a clear message to the entire international community, reaffirming the human rights of the world's indigenous peoples. This landmark action of the United Nations bears political, legal, symbolic and moral significance and constitutes a crucial opportunity for the United Nations system and other inter-governmental organizations to critically reflect upon their engagement with indigenous peoples' issues and, according to article 42 of the Declaration, to promote respect for and full application of its provisions and follow-up its effectiveness. The Support Group pledges to advance the spirit and letter of the Declaration within our agencies' mandates and to ensure that the Declaration becomes a living document throughout our work.

11. The Support Group will hold an extraordinary meeting before the seventh session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to discuss the impact of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on the work of the agencies and invites OHCHR and ILO to organize such a meeting. In preparation for that meeting, each agency is invited to prepare a paper with reflections on the implications of the adoption of the Declaration for its work. The report of the meeting will be presented to the Permanent Forum and other relevant bodies.

12. Major areas for agency work already identified by the Support Group include dissemination, capacity-building, programming, translation into indigenous languages and popularization of the Declaration.

III. Discussions and recommendations

A. Climate change[1]

13. The impact of climate change on indigenous communities, their traditional knowledge and related biological diversity was of great concern to members of the Support Group. Indigenous peoples, often among the world's most marginalized and impoverished peoples, would bear the brunt of the catastrophe of climate change and, as such, provided a human face to the climate change crises. The most advanced scientific research had concluded that changes in climate would gravely harm the health of their traditional lands and waters and that many of the plants and animals upon which they depended for survival would be threatened by the immediate impacts of climate change. It was felt that such conclusions required urgent and unprecedented efforts and interventions from the global community.

14. It was noted with concern that indigenous peoples in particular regions and situations, such as the Arctic, small islands and high altitudes, low-lying lands and river deltas, semi-humid and arid lands, and especially pastoralists and semi-nomadic peoples, were experiencing accelerated climate change and should thus be considered highly vulnerable.

15. Members of the Support Group emphasized that despite such challenges, indigenous and local communities were not simply the passive victims of climate change but valuable partners in the global efforts to address the issue. It was noted that indigenous peoples were already using their traditional knowledge to address and adapt to climate change at the local level. Members of the Group believed that indigenous peoples had a great deal to contribute in designing and implementing solutions to climate change. Adaptation and mitigation measures to address climate change could be enhanced when they were informed by traditional knowledge and developed with the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and organizations. Members of the Group reported on the various initiatives of agencies concerning indigenous peoples and climate change and considered ways and means of effective collaboration in pursuit of mutual goals.

16. Recognizing that the theme of the seventh session of the Permanent Forum would be climate change, members of the Support Group agreed to prepare a common paper on the matter, which would be presented to the Permanent Forum at its seventh session. John Scott, representing the Convention on Biological Diversity, was appointed as the coordinator of the paper.

17. It was recommended that the paper include an overview of the impact of climate change on indigenous peoples, especially the social, cultural, human rights and development impacts. The paper would also include an analysis of mitigation and adaptation issues, focusing on the challenges, threats and opportunities such measures posed for indigenous peoples. That might be enhanced through the inclusion of case studies on carbon-trading, biofuels and mono-cropping and other relevant issues, including support for traditional livelihoods. The paper could also outline elements of a common approach by the United Nations system concerning indigenous peoples, their issues and climate change and on how the Declaration

[1] Including a discussion on biofuels, mono-cropping and agricultural biodiversity (tied in with climate change adaptation and mitigation).

could provide a common framework. The Support Group paper would appear as an addendum to the present report.

18. Members of the Support Group concluded their discussions on climate change by strongly recommending that the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and the comprehensive consideration of their issues be integrated in all work carried out by Group agencies, including in their programmes, policies and strategies. It was noted that that would be of particular importance when addressing the issues of adaptation and mitigation, as well as emerging issues, such as biofuels.

B. Regional level

19. The Support Group noted that there were currently a number of positive opportunities for engagement on indigenous issues within the intergovernmental system at the regional level, especially in the African region. It reiterated its commitment to cooperate and strategize at the regional level for positive outcomes in that regard. Group cooperation and common projects at the regional level could draw from the Group's own recommendations at its 2005 annual meeting devoted to that issue, the Plan of Action of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and the recommendations of the Permanent Forum resulting from its region-specific discussions.[2] It was agreed that a method of advancing inter-agency cooperation on indigenous peoples' issues at the regional level could be through the creation of regional e-mail groups within the Group. OHCHR offered to initiate Group discussion on the possibility of the Group's strategizing and promoting a regional approach.

C. Follow-up to 2006 recommendations

20. The Support Group noted the fact that a satisfactory follow-up to its 2006 recommendations was provided by its member agencies.

D. Indicators

21. The Support Group noted the rich ongoing work being carried out by various agencies on indicators relating to indigenous peoples' well-being and poverty, namely the secretariat of the Permanent Forum, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, UNESCO and ILO. The Group acknowledged the desirability of both global indicators that capture indigenous realities and the establishment of system indicators to measure progress within the international system.

22. The Support Group, in order to support United Nations country teams and in view of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the upcoming adoption of the United Nations Development Group guidelines on indigenous peoples' issues, decided to promote the adoption and use of provisional

[2] At its fifth session, in 2006, the Permanent Forum held a specific discussion on Africa and at its sixth session, in 2007, the Forum held a discussion on Asia. Other region-specific discussions of the Forum will be held during subsequent sessions. The recommendations of the Forum on Africa and Asia are contained in documents E/2006/43 and E/2007/43, respectively.

indicators resulting from current collaboration between indigenous peoples and international organizations, for testing, as appropriate.

E. Funds

23. Given the existence of a number of United Nations system funds that can be accessed directly by indigenous peoples' organizations, the Support Group invites the secretariat of the Permanent Forum to create a web page regarding those funds on its website and encourages Group members and others to forward information on funding opportunities to the secretariat of the Forum for collation and display. The web page should list the funds with relevant contact information and/or provide a link supplemented by a brief description of the purpose of each fund.[3]

24. Given the complexity of administering indigenous issues-related funds, the Support Group recommended that a meeting be organized among relevant agency focal points dealing with funds to exchange experiences and lessons learned.

F. United Nations Development Group

25. The Support Group recognizes the efforts of its members in fulfilling its mandate regarding the United Nations development guidelines. The work of the United Nations Development Group Task Team on Indigenous Issues in preparing guidelines for United Nations country teams is particularly appreciated. The Support Group looks forward to the adoption of the guidelines by the United Nations Development Group by the end of the year, as well as the action plan for their implementation. It will continue to pursue work through the United Nations Development Group to promote the operationalization of indigenous-related programmes and policies at the field level.

26. The Support Group suggests that the Task Team on Indigenous Issues consider sending its draft guidelines to a selection of "One UN" pilot United Nations country teams for review and feedback, in addition to the eight country teams that have already been selected. Support Group agencies with field presence are willing to support the Task Team by contacting their country office focal points so that they may alert the United Nations Resident Coordinators' Offices and ensure that the country teams provide timely feedback on the draft guidelines.

27. The Support Group recommends that the guidelines on indigenous issues include the full text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in an annex and that the Task Team produce a CD-ROM containing a resource kit and other relevant resources, tools and manuals to supplement the guidelines. The resource kit should include a selection of the most relevant instruments and documents cited as references in the text, as well as agencies' policies on indigenous issues.

[3] Such information has already been included in the website of the secretariat of the Permanent Forum (www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii).

G. Follow-up on the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration, Santiago, 27 to 29 March 2007

28. The recommendations made by the participants in the Expert Group Meeting[4] to the international community, including the United Nations, included an invitation to the co-organizers of the Meeting to consider the elaboration of guidelines for Governments and local authorities to assist in the development of public policies related to indigenous peoples and their challenges faced in urban areas. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme will take the lead on developing the requested guidelines in collaboration with the other co-organizers pending the availability of funding.

H. Other matters: migration

29. After an in-depth discussion on migration and indigenous peoples and current international structures dealing with migration, such as the Global Migration Group, the members of the Support Group from agencies with an interest in the issue of indigenous peoples and migration decided to establish a migration contact group within the Support Group so as to identify relevant ongoing work within individual agencies and to strategize on how to raise the specific issues of indigenous peoples within the migration debate. The representative from the International Organization on Migration was appointed as the convenor of the contact group.

I. Reflecting on the sixth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

30. The members of the Support Group stand ready to assist the members of the Permanent Forum throughout the process of drafting recommendations, with the goal of supporting the drafting of recommendations that are technically accurate and within the mandate of agencies, to ensure they are given due respect and effectively acted upon. The members of the Group encourage the members of the Permanent Forum to have an ongoing dialogue with Group focal points before and during the session to achieve recommendations that are effective and can be implemented.

31. Members of the Support Group emphasized that the strengthening of working methods to aid dialogue among United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues members and their portfolios is highly desirable. The portfolio system, which has been adopted by the members of the Permanent Forum, is seen as a useful mechanism for increasing communication between the Group, the international system and the members and participants at the sessions of the Forum. Communication and collaboration is best achieved when members of the Forum can draw fully from focused agency documents within their portfolios and engage in interactive dialogue with agencies.

[4] The Expert Group Meeting on Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration was an activity of the United Nations Housing Rights Programme, co-organized by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the secretariat of the Permanent Forum and the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration.

32. Regional meetings of the Permanent Forum may assist with costs and access by indigenous peoples, as well as promoting indigenous issues within certain regions.

33. Member visits and bilateral strengthening of relationships will be beneficial for the Permanent Forum and are highly desirable.

34. The Support Group recognizes the need to provide greater time for thematic discussions during the sessions of the Permanent Forum and suggests that consideration be given to the possible submission of agency reports on a periodic basis. A periodic reporting system may help to promote a deeper and more effective dialogue, with the participation of indigenous peoples.

35. The members of the Support Group committed themselves to provide focused and concise reports and to encourage and contribute towards interactive and deep dialogue to advance issues relevant to indigenous peoples and the Permanent Forum.

J. Strengthening of working methods, member support and a revised terms of reference of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues

36. Members of the Support Group reviewed and revised the terms of reference of the Group and, in doing so, provided further suggestions on the drafting and approved the amendments. The updated and adopted revised terms of reference are contained in the annex to the present report. Significantly, the terms of reference have been revised to include the term "indigenous peoples" in the name of the Support Group, reflecting the Group's commitment to the full and effective implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Annex

Terms of reference of the United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues

(Revised and adopted on 19 September 2007)

Purpose

1. The Inter-Agency Support Group is a mechanism for international cooperation on indigenous peoples' issues in relation to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,[a] programmes and mechanisms and other intergovernmental bodies' and entities on indigenous peoples' issues.

Membership of the Inter-Agency Support Group

2. The Inter-Agency Support Group shall be composed of focal points/units or representatives as identified by Heads of the departments or intergovernmental organizations, within the international system, whose work is relevant to indigenous peoples and their issues.

3. Representatives should have broad knowledge and experience of the United Nations system and of activities concerning indigenous peoples' issues within their organizations.

4. Membership in the group implies a commitment to participate regularly and to share information in a timely fashion to enable and facilitate coordination and cooperation.

Terms of reference

5. The Inter-Agency Support Group shall:

(a) Provide an opportunity for the focal points, units or representatives of its members to meet regularly to exchange information in relation to their work on indigenous peoples' issues;

(b) Consider ways of strengthening cooperation among its members to promote the human rights and well-being of indigenous peoples through joint activities and other forms of cooperation;

[a] The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is an advisory body of independent experts reporting to the Economic and Social Council on all matters within the mandate of the Council and was established by the Council in its resolution 2000/22. The General Assembly, in its resolution 57/191, entitled "Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues", explicitly referred to the Inter-Agency Support Group and invited the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, including the Support Group, other relevant international and regional organizations and bodies, and indigenous peoples to assist the Forum in carrying out its mandate as enumerated in paragraph 2 of Council resolution 2000/22, including through the provision of staff.

(c) Analyse recommendations of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and contribute to their implementation on the basis of the mandates, resources and capacity of each organization;

(d) Develop relationships with Governments, donors, civil society organizations, indigenous peoples' organizations and others to consider cooperative ways of supporting the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues;

(e) Interact with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and its members to provide and seek information, advice and substantive inputs;

(f) Advise and assist in the mainstreaming of indigenous peoples' issues within the international system;

(g) Strengthen mutual support for the focal points/units or representatives in each of the agencies, organizations, programmes and entities participating in the Inter-Agency Support Group.

Methods of operation

6. The Inter-Agency Support Group shall meet at least once a year for a substantive meeting, with follow-up meetings as necessary.

7. The chair of the Inter-Agency Support Group rotates through the member organizations, bodies and entities on an annual basis. The chair is responsible for the hosting, convening and facilitation of an annual Support Group meeting.

8. The secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues[b] provides support and continuity to the chair and Inter-Agency Support Group as required.

9. The Inter-Agency Support Group will invite members of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as contributors to the discussions.

10. The Inter-Agency Support Group may invite, on an ad hoc basis, experts, non-governmental organizations and other entities whose work may contribute to the work of the Support Group, as observers and contributors to its discussions. These invited contributors would be able to attend such parts of the inter-agency meetings as may be decided by the rotating chair of the Support Group, after consulting with other members of the Support Group.

11. The Inter-Agency Support Group members participating in the annual Support Group meeting are responsible for covering their own costs in relation to meetings.

12. The Inter-Agency Support Group shall keep a record of proceedings.

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[b] Recalling the mandate of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which includes to "promote coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the United Nations system".